Can We Start Again?

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/2652935.

Rating:
Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
M/M

Fandoms:
Smallville, Man of Steel (2013), Young Justice (Cartoon)

Relationships:
Clark Kent/Lex Luthor, Clark Kent & Conner Kent & Lex Luthor, Clark Kent & Jonathan Kent

Characters:
Clark Kent, Lex Luthor, Conner Kent, Martha Kent, Jonathan Kent

Additional Tags:
Alternate Universe - Fusion, Time Travel Fix-It, Kid Fic, Redemption, Friends to Lovers, Angst with a Happy Ending, Parenthood, Science, Honesty, Reveal, Lex just needs someone to love him, Hope, Literal Sleeping Together, Clark Saves Lex, Clark Saves Everyone, Everything is Beautiful and Nothing Hurts

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of Everything I Loved

Stats:
Published: 2014-11-21 Words: 6,210 Chapters: 1/1

Can We Start Again?

by Rosawyn

Summary

An older Clark, filled with regret, comes back to warn his younger self. Maybe with a second try, he can get it right.

Notes

Intentionally draws details from multiple DC canons.
Titles “Everything I Loved” and “Can We Start Again?” are from “Start Again” by Red, a song that could probably be the soundtrack for this fic.

See the end of the work for more notes

The rain pounded down, slicking Clark's clothes to his body as he ran through the darkness. He knew the way to the Luthor Mansion, had been there often enough.

'This secret costs you more than his friendship,' his older self had said, 'it costs our father's *life*.' No, no, Lex didn't do that, his future self had assured, quickly enough. Jonathan had done that himself. Died, by his own choice, to protect Clark's secret. And Clark had let him. He didn't understand how he could ever do that.

He didn't understand how he could ever consider killing Lex either, and yet that's what his future self had said: 'I should have killed him. *Should* kill him.' A shake of his head, misery in the set of his jaw. 'But I know so much of this is *my* fault. He was never given a chance. No one loved him; no one ever told him he was good—when you're told you're bad often enough for long enough, you start to believe it. And it's so hard to *do* good when you think you're bad.' Helpless eyes, meeting Clark's. 'He wants so badly to be good, here, in your time. He hasn't given up trying.'

Clark vaulted up the side of the mansion to Lex's window—the light was still on, but that wasn't too surprising; Lex was probably working late. But as far as Clark could see, Lex wasn't in the room, so he just pulled the window open and climbed in.

He was dripping all over the floor when Lex walked in, expression registering mild surprise. At first, all he did was roll his eyes and say, “Close the window, Clark; it's cold enough in here as it is.”

“Right, sorry.” Clark closed the window.

“Did you *fly* up?” Lex was digging through his dark wood dresser. “It's not like there's a conveniently placed ladder—at least not that I know of.”

Was that something he'd learn eventually? His future self had said more powers came to him as he grew. 'It's never enough,' he'd admitted, his head in his hands, his voice haunted. He'd worn a red cape, like some hero from a storybook, a curl of dark hair in the middle of his forehead, and a sadness deep in his blue eyes. 'No matter how many I save, it's never enough.'

Lex tossed a large fluffy towel at him followed by a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt. “Not sure the shirt will fit, actually.” Lex shrugged, radiating unconcern.

“There's something—” Clark tried, rubbing the towel over his face and through his hair. “Something I need to tell you.”

Lex flopped lazily down on his bed. “If it was a real emergency, you would have used a phone like a civilized person, Clark.” He gestured to the clothes Clark had dropped onto a chair. “Whatever it is can wait until you're not in danger of dying of hypothermia.” His smile did nothing to moderate the obvious expectation of obedience.

Stripping off his button-up and t-shirt, Clark shook his head, grinning. He had no chance of actual hypothermia, in fact... “That's part of the reason I'm here...”

“What, you already have hypothermia?” Lex quirked an eyebrow at him over the top of whatever old hardcover book he was reading. “If that's the case, you'd better get out of those things quicker.”

Clark paused as he toed his way out of his soaked shoes. His older self had said that Lex was in love with him, 'or at least as much in love as he's capable of, which might merely be obsession.' But Lex didn't seem overly interested in watching Clark change—then again, he wasn't leaving the room or telling Clark to do it in the bathroom either.

Lex turned a page in his book. “Do you need *help*, Clark?” he asked, a layer of amusement in his voice.

Clark licked his lips nervously. He kicked his wet socks aside along with his wet shirts and squared his shoulders. “What if I did?”

A smirk spread across Lex's face, but he didn't look up from his book. “I'd tell you that's one of the lamest lines I've ever heard, and that you should probably use it on Chloe. Or Pete.”

Clark ducked his head. “Sorry.”

Sighing, Lex laid aside his book and slid off the bed, walking across the room to where Clark stood, still in his soggy jeans. Reaching up one hand, he patted Clark's cheek. “You're dripping all over my floor.”

Clark swallowed. “Sorry,” he said again.

Bending down, Lex picked up Clark's discarded clothes. “I'll go hang these in the bathroom.” He turned and walked out.

Fine. Clark quickly stripped off his jeans—his underwear too, since they were uncomfortably damp—and pulled on the sweatpants. The

shirt, however, wasn't going to fit unless Clark stretched it out terribly, so he just tossed it over the back of the chair.

Walking back into the room, Lex picked up Clark's jeans and underwear, rolling his eyes and flashing Clark an indulgent smile. “Sometimes I think *you* need all the servants, Clark.” When Clark moved to follow him, Lex shook his head. “Wait here; I'll be right back.”

Clark sighed, sitting down on the edge of Lex's bed. 'He has so much capacity for good,' his future self had said. 'But so much capacity for evil.' He'd told Clark about the child, too. The one Lex would make from combining their DNA. 'I hurt that poor boy, Clark. It was never Conner's fault; he never asked to be made. But I was so afraid.' He'd swallowed, looked away. 'I couldn't even look at him.' He hadn't said it aloud, but Clark had understood—a sense of violation, to have his DNA taken and used without his knowledge or consent. It had turned out okay, he'd explained, for Conner, but no child deserves to be rejected by their father. 'And I knew better. By God, I *knew better*, and I did it anyway.' His whole body had twitched, and he'd looked away. 'Lex was a better father than I was, and how—' His voice had shaken. 'How does *that* make any sense?'

“Clark?”

Clark looked up. Lex was standing just inside the bedroom door—he'd been so lost in thought he hadn't even heard it close.

One side of Lex's lips quirked up as he walked toward Clark. “My kingdom for your thoughts?”

I was wondering what our baby would look like. Yeah, that wouldn't go over well. Probably. In any case, it wasn't how Clark wanted to bring up that particular topic. He shook his head to clear it, leaning his folded arms on his knees. “Sorry.”

Sitting down next to him, Lex bumped his shoulder into Clark's. His voice dipped conspiratorially as he said, “You say that too much.”

“Sorry.” Oh. Clark blushed, managed *not* to say 'sorry' again and just make himself look stupider. Swallowing, Clark took a shaky breath. “Maybe—maybe I say it so much, because I have something to be sorry for.”

“Now what,” Lex said thoughtfully, “could Clark Kent possibly have to be sorry for?”

Clark closed his eyes. “Lying.”

“You sound like you're at confession.” Lex bumped his shoulder into Clark's again. “You know I'm not a priest, right?”

Clark laughed quietly. “I'm a Methodist, Lex, not a Catholic.”

Lex snorted softly. “And I'm supposed to remember the difference?”

Clark shrugged, offering Lex a small smile.

“So...” Lex prompted, “you should probably elaborate on that whole 'lying' confession before I assume that you lied about the wrong thing. My mind is quick and can jump to very terrifying conclusions.”

Clark wasn't sure what to say, wasn't sure what words to choose. His future self really hadn't been too helpful about that. Finally, he just blurted, “You did hit me—that day, on the bridge. With your car.” He scraped his teeth over his bottom lip and continued. “I didn't know at the time that it wouldn't hurt—I mean, I'd guessed, but I'd never tried getting hit with a car before. But I knew...” His voice dropped to a rough whisper. “I knew I wasn't human.”

Lex was very still at his side.

“I'm sorry I lied!” Clark continued, desperate to fix this somehow. “My father—he was right there, and he—he's always said don't let *anyone* know, to keep it hidden.” Ducking his head, Clark fought back the tears at the idea of his father *dying* for that lie, swept away in a tornado, while some future version of himself watched, helpless in his obedience.

'It wasn't worth it,' his future self had said, fingers laced together as his hands hung limply between his knees. 'Losing him, it *wasn't worth it.*'

“No, I get it, Clark.” Lex laid a hand, firm and grounding, on Clark's wrist. “He's your father.”

And maybe Lex really didn't understand what that meant. Maybe he understood something different, something related, but not quite similar.

“So if you're not human,” Lex said carefully, “what are you?”

So Clark explained what he knew—about crashing spaceships and

dying worlds, about alien parents he'd never met, about too loud sounds that threatened to overwhelm, and meteor showers that followed him down. Somewhere in the torrent of words, he must have explained about being alone, about being the last of his kind, because...

Lex pulled him into a hug. “I'm here, Clark. You've got me, all right?” And he offered Clark a smile filled with hope and affection.

And Clark thought, *maybe he does love me*, because it didn't look like obsession.

And it only felt like being safe.

How could a future Lex do so much bad? Clark leaned against him, resting his forehead against Lex's shoulder. “I don't want to lose you.”

'Don't let jealousy get in the way,' his future self had said. 'There's more at stake here than your own broken heart.' And yet, it still felt like that was the main thing at stake. He was putting his heart in Lex's hands, and asking him not to crush it. *Please*.

“You're not going to lose me.” Lex pressed a kiss to the top of Clark's head. It didn't feel creepy or scary or even weird. It felt nice.

Clark let himself be pulled down with Lex to lie on the bed, his own body half on top of Lex. The material of Lex's pyjamas felt slightly odd against Clark's bare chest. But Lex's arms around him felt warm.

“Do you need a ride home?” Lex asked.

Clark grunted unhappily then mumbled against Lex's chest, “Can't I just sleep here?”

“Ah, so you do sleep,” Lex said, voice thoughtful.

Maybe Clark should have been annoyed, but he just hummed in affirmation. It was late, and he'd run all the way there; he was tired.

“Might look strange to some people, you sleeping here.” Lex's hands moved smoothly over Clark's shoulders.

Clark's brow furrowed, and he pushed himself up to study Lex's face. “Do you want me to leave?”

“No.” Lex swallowed, grinned, then shrugged his shoulders. “We'll tell everyone you slept in a guest room or something. It's not a big deal.”

Clark's brows twisted. “*Should* I sleep in a guest room?”

Lex shook his head, hands soothing as they moved up and down Clark's back. “Just sleep here.”

o0o

Clark woke to the brush of Lex's finger on his cheek. He blinked, eyes focusing on Lex's face so near his own.

“Why did you tell me?” Lex's voice was soft.

Clark couldn't tell him about a visitor from the future, couldn't—couldn't say, 'It was tell you or *kill* you,' couldn't explain about a future where Lex was cold and cruel and mad with power. So he said, “I couldn't keep lying to you,” because that was true.

Lex smiled softly, fingers resting lightly on Clark's neck. “And why is that?”

“I—” It was too early for Clark to fake a convincing 'I don't know,' even if it was partly true. His eyes widened of their own accord, betraying him.

“Oh.” There was a pleased light in Lex's eyes as his fingers stroked up the side of Clark's neck. “It's all right, Clark. You mean a great deal to me as well.” And he kissed Clark's forehead.

So Clark wrapped his arms around Lex and clung to him, because Lex meant so much to him, and he needed to let him know. 'I hope I'm doing all right,' he thought to his future self, though maybe that defeated man who'd come to him had faded already, since Clark had changed the future so irrevocably. He only hoped he'd changed it for the better.

“Clark.” Lex ran his fingers through Clark's hair. “You seem...worried.”

“I guess I am,” Clark admitted, offering him an apologetic smile. “I'm worried about the future.”

Lex smiled, reassuring. “It'll be all right, Clark. We'll make it all right. Together.”

o0o

Clark learned that there was more than one way to lose a father. But of course it was better to have one who was still alive and just never

talked to him. Of course it was. He told himself that *of course it was*.

“I'm sorry,” Lex said.

“No.” Clark grasped him tightly, made him look into his eyes. “This isn't your fault.”

Lex smiled, eyes sad. “Of course it's my fault.”

Clark shook his head, adamant. “It's not.” He shook Lex slightly, gripping his shoulders. “I don't blame you.”

Lex smiled that same sad smile again. “But he does.”

And there wasn't anything Clark could say to that.

o0o

“Can I help with that?” Clark offered.

Jonathan was lifting bales of hay onto the back of his truck. He didn't look at Clark. “Shouldn't you be up at the mansion, spooning with your sugar daddy?”

Clark took a step back, stunned. The words hurt, but the problem with growing up alien was that he didn't really have anything to compare it to. A human would probably say 'stung,' 'cut,' 'burned.'

Jonathan threw another bale onto the truck and sighed, turning toward Clark, eyes downcast. “That was...out of line. I—” He broke off, making a frustrated sound. He pulled off his gloves and slapped them against the leg of his jeans. He shook his head, looking away towards the horizon.

Clark folded his arms across his chest, kicked at a rock in the dusty dirt road. “Guess I should be glad you're talking to me at all.” He silently cursed his voice for cracking on the word 'glad.'

Slapping his gloves down on the bed of the truck, Jonathan made a frustrated noise and walked up to Clark, pulling him into a rough hug. “You know I'm worried about you, that I care about you, right?” He pulled back, studying Clark's face.

Clark nodded shakily. His arms had been folded, so he hadn't been able to hug back. That was just an excuse, though. He'd known his dad was going to hug him, and he'd kept them folded because he was angry—angry that the first thing his father had said to him in *weeks*

was so rude, angry that he was trying to save the people he loved from suffering and even *death* and getting judged for it. The words, 'I'm sorry,' caught in his throat; he wouldn't apologize for this thing with Lex. “I love him,” he said instead. But he let his arms fall to his sides.

Jonathan sighed. “I know you do. Of course you do. Why else would you—?” He shook his head, letting his own arms fall to his sides. His voice was gruff when he said, “But does he love you? Is he even capable of that?”

The truth was, Clark didn't know. He thought maybe. “I hope so,” he said finally.

“Yeah.” Jonathan gripped Clark's shoulder tightly. His voice was rough, like the words were dragged out of him with heavy iron hooks. “Me too.”

o0o

“Would it be possible...” Clark began one day. Lex was working on something in his lab, and Clark was hanging out. He was supposed to be working on his journalism homework—his second year at Metropolis University was going well, but this assignment was dragging, so he tossed his pen aside to stand up and lean on a lab table near Lex.

“Would what be possible?” Lex shot him a small smile over the top of a beaker that held blue liquid.

“To...with science...” Clark rubbed awkwardly at the back of his neck. Why was it so hard to just say it? He already knew it was possible, or at least could be.

Lex smirked indulgently. “Nearly anything is possible with science, Clark.”

Clark blew out a breath through his lips. “Could—would it be possible to combine the DNA of two men to make a baby?”

“Well,” Lex replied, looking closely at his experiment, “you'd need a donor egg in which to combine the DNA and then some sort of uterus —either natural or artificial—for the gestation, but...” He looked up, meeting Clark's eyes. “In theory, it's entirely possible.” Then a look of realization passed over his face followed quickly by surprise and pleasure. “Is that something you want, Clark? Something you'd want

to try?”

Clark ducked his head, nodded a little. “I mean, if—if it's *safe*, of course. I wouldn't—I wouldn't want—” He'd seen enough sci-fi to know that these stories often resulted in horrors of one sort or another, mounds of malformed flesh begging to be killed. He swallowed down his irrational fear. He knew it didn't turn out that way, *hadn't* turned out that way. Conner—there was a boy, Conner, partly human and partly Kryptonian with black hair and blue eyes and a desperate drive to please his father. Angry and scared, but ultimately kind and good and capable of so much love.

'He needed his father,' his future self had said, 'but I didn't want to be that. I was so selfish.' He'd shaken his head, guilty.

Lex put his hand on Clark's shoulder, looked up at him. “Of course we'd make sure it's safe.” He pressed a kiss to Clark's jaw. “You would make a wonderful father, Clark.”

Clark swallowed. Maybe he *could* be a good father, but he knew he *hadn't* been. At least not at first. “So would you,” he said, because his future self had said Lex had been a better father than him. Maybe that wasn't saying a lot, but Lex was capable of good too.

“Well.” Lex stepped back, offering Clark half a smile. “I can try.”

Grabbing him, Clark pulled him into a hug. “Yeah.” Pulling back to look into his eyes he said, “That's all either of us can do.”

o0o

“So,” Lex said, grinning with barely contained excitement as he walked towards the lab with Clark keeping pace at his side, “boy or girl? Because I'm pretty sure I could do either—or one of both—whatever you want.”

“Um, just one.” Clark's brow furrowed with worry. He was pretty sure they couldn't handle twins. Well, they *could*, since they could afford a nanny, but...he wanted to do this themselves, just the two of them. “And...” Since he was being given the option. “A boy?”

Lex grinned. “Boys are simpler, right? No dresses or hair bows or anything like that. I never even had any sisters—neither did you, obviously—we wouldn't have any idea what to do with a girl.”

Clark shrugged. It couldn't make *too* much difference, but boys did

seem simpler. And, well, he already had the name picked out. “Can we call him 'Conner'?”

Pushing open the door of the lab, Lex tilted his head to one side as he looked at Clark. “Why 'Conner'? I mean, I like it; I'm just curious.”

Clark shrugged again. “I just kind of like it?”

Lex grinned. “That's a good enough reason for me.” He looked thoughtful. “'Conner Luthor', though—it sort of...rhymes?”

Clark licked his lips, watching Lex carefully as he took a breath and said, “What about 'Conner Kent'?”

Lex rolled his eyes, grinning. “He's going to be my heir, so he needs the Luthor name on his birth certificate.” His brow furrowed slightly. “'Conner Kent Luthor'? 'Conner Luthor Kent'?” He pursed his lips thoughtfully. “I suppose we *could* hyphenate the last names, 'Luthor-Kent' or 'Kent-Luthor'.”

“If we put it as 'Conner Kent Luthor'—no hyphens or anything—on his birth certificate,” Clark said, leaning back against one of the lab tables, “he could still go by 'Conner Kent' for school and stuff, couldn't he?”

Lex's eyes met Clark's, filled with sincerity. “Yeah. Absolutely.”

o0o

“Do you think...” Lex hesitated, hand poised over the petri dish. He frowned, eyes narrowing. “Do you think he should be more you than me?”

Clark shook his head. “I think he should be an equal combination.”

“But...” Lex's shoulders hunched. He grimaced. “There's—I don't have a lot of good DNA, Clark, just some genius intellect stuff. And you're this super-powered being. Your only *bad* quality is a paradoxical propensity for lying while also being terrible at it.” A smile tried to form on his face, but it fell apart. He turned his head, meeting Clark's eyes. “Wouldn't he be better off more like you?”

Clark put his hand over Lex's, hoping to reassure. “You *are* brilliant, Lex. But you have a lot of compassion, too. And drive and determination, and a desire to help people. There's a lot in you that would make a good kid.” He gave Lex's wrist a gentle squeeze. “I want

our child to be *our* child; I want to do this together."

Resting his forearms on the lab table, Lex let out a shaky breath. "Okay. If you're sure."

Clark ran a soothing hand up and down Lex's back. "I'm sure."

Lex shot him bright smile. "One thing we know: he's gonna be beautiful."

Clark grinned. "Yeah, he is."

o0o

The day Conner was born, Clark and Lex were the only ones there in the lab. Lex didn't want any of his employees around, didn't want anyone stealing his ideas, his tech, or any DNA. They could call Lex's personal physician if they needed him, but Lex didn't anticipate any complications—Conner's vitals on the artificial uterus' readouts remained strong and his growth had been good the whole time. Clark had considered asking his mother to be there, but had decided it should just be him and Lex. Martha had said to call her if they needed anything. And he'd promised her she could see the baby soon.

Clark stood next to the lab table, trying to calm his nerves as Lex fiddled with the artificial uterus. Lex had designed it and built it; he knew what he was doing. The lights were dimmed and the temperature in the room was warm. They both had their shirts off, because Martha had said immediate skin-to-skin contact was helpful for both bonding and stabilizing the baby's body temperature and to his overall health. "Is he still okay?" Clark couldn't stop the words as they spilled out of his mouth.

Looking up, Lex rolled his eyes, an indulgent smile playing at the corners of his mouth. "You can look at the readouts for yourself; I programed them all to use English and standard Arabic numerals."

"Sorry." Clark shot him a hesitant, apologetic smile. "I know." It was difficult to believe it was *real*, though. To believe Conner was real, for all the time he'd spent in the lab, talking to and reading to his baby, for all the hours Lex had spent adjusting the nutrient flow and whatever else, for all the reassurances that this would work, that it was safe.

And then Lex flicked a switch or pressed a control or something, and the artificial uterus opened—kind of like a flower on time-lapse

photography—and there was Conner, curled inside a transparent sac. Lex prodded the sac with a tool that looked oddly like a crochet hook, and it opened, clear, jelly-like fluid draining away. “His vitals are all still stable,” Lex said. He met Clark's eyes. “Pick him up, Clark.”

So Clark did, careful to support his head the way Martha had explained was important. He was slippery and covered in a white pasty substance, but Martha had told him about that too, and said just to leave it, as it was good for the baby's skin—sort of like a natural lotion. Clark hadn't asked how his mother knew so much about birth and babies; it felt rude, and she'd probably just talked to a lot of other mothers about it or something. He trusted her judgement, and Lex said it all lined up with 'evidence based' care according to the reading he'd done during the past months. Clark held Conner against his chest as Lex clamped and cut the cord.

“You can sit down with him,” Lex suggested.

Clark sat down carefully, then leaned back in the large lounge chair they'd brought to the lab for the occasion.

Lex laid a dryer-warmed flannel blanket over them.

“You too, Lex.” Clark smiled encouragingly. “It's why you have your shirt off, remember?”

But Conner was rooting around on Clark's chest, looking for food as every newborn mammal does—and he wasn't about to find any without a little extra help.

Lex and Clark both laughed, and Lex quickly grabbed the bottle—a special design he'd made himself, closer to the shape and function of a human breast, because, as he said, he'd had few clues as to what a Kryptonian breast was meant to be. The formula was also of his own making, apparently far closer to human milk than anything available on the market.

He tried to hand the bottle to Clark, but Clark said, “Get down here and feed him yourself,” motioning Lex over with a jerk of his head.

Nodding a little shakily, Lex crawled onto the lounge chair, settling himself carefully next to Clark.

Clark helped arrange the blanket to cover Lex as well, then passed Conner over. “Here, Conner, meet your Papa. He's taken very good care of you while you were getting ready to be born.”

Conner immediately started searching for food on Lex's chest, his little mouth wide open.

Lex and Clark both laughed again.

“Hey, I've actually got some food for you,” Lex said, squeezing a drop of formula out, and offering the nipple to his son.

Conner latched on quickly and began drinking. There wasn't much in the bottle, of course, since his newborn stomach was still so tiny. They'd have to feed him often at first, every two to three hours around the clock. Unless his Kryptonian DNA made things different. That really was the one variable they couldn't quite predict. But they'd just watch his cues, like every parent had to do, ultimately.

“So I'm going to be 'Papa' and you'll be 'Daddy'?” Lex asked.

Clark shrugged one shoulder. “You can be 'Daddy' if you want.”

Lex shook his head. “You've already told him I'm 'Papa'; we need to be consistent.”

It didn't matter, since Conner was still so young and wouldn't understand or remember their words, but Lex was right—all the child psychologists and child development experts agreed that consistency was important. So Clark rested his forehead against Lex's and said, “You're right. So you'll be 'Papa', and I'll be, 'Daddy'.”

“Oh, God, Clark.” There were tears in Lex's eyes. “We actually did it. He's ours.”

“And he's beautiful,” Clark agreed, kissing Lex's cheek. “Like his father.”

“Like both his fathers?” Lex's laugh was damp and shaky.

“Yeah.” Clark grinned. “Like both of us.”

o0o

“Mom, Dad,” Clark said, grin showing his pride, showing his joy, “this is your grandson, Conner Kent Luthor.” He held up the tiny baby, all swaddled in a blue blanket, for them to see. He held the baby out to his mother. “Want to hold him?”

“Of course.” Martha accepted the baby, smile filled with tenderness and eyes shining with tears. “Oh, he's so *beautiful*.”

“Is that, uh, Kent-Luthor, a hyphenated last name?” Jonathan asked, gesturing to the baby.

Clark shook his head. “Just the three names with no hyphens.” He shrugged. “I guess Kent is technically his middle name.”

“But he'll go by 'Conner Kent',” Lex explained, wrapping his arm around Clark's back and resting his hand on Clark's hip. “The 'Luthor' part is only for legal documents and the like.”

Jonathan nodded, frowning slightly. He didn't look angry or upset, just thoughtful.

“Here, Jonathan,” Martha said, shifting the baby in her arms and offering him to her husband. “You hold him for a bit.”

Jonathan smiled down at the baby as he took him, expression a little surprised. “He's so *light*.”

“He was eight pounds when he was born,” Lex explained. “He lost a bit like all babies do. And he's been eating well.” He was defensive, and hiding it well.

Clark leaned into Lex's side, offering his parents a broad grin. “I guess I was never quite that small.”

Jonathan shook his head. “Not when we saw you, anyway.”

Martha touched Clark's arm lightly. There was a hint of worry in her eyes. “He breathes okay at night?”

Clark nodded. “He's been totally fine.” He smiled warmly, filled with relief that Conner had none of the issues he'd had as a Kryptonian child on a brand new planet. “No issues adjusting to the atmosphere or anything.” He shot Lex a grin. “I think Lex's human DNA helps with that.”

“I guess my DNA's good for something.” Lex's voice was quiet—Clark was probably the only one who could hear.

“Your DNA is *good*,” Clark replied, voice low and mouth near Lex's ear. “There is a lot of *good* in your DNA.”

There was a hint of hope in the smile Lex gave him, and it made hope soar in Clark's own heart.

o0o

It was three thirty am, and Conner was crying. He'd been crying for half an hour. Clark had fed him, changed him, rocked him, sang to him. Lex had got up and tried walking around with Conner, but nothing either of them did helped. He'd calm down for a few minutes, but as soon as they tried to lay him down in his crib, he'd scream again. Sometimes, he'd just scream again when they *hadn't* tried to lay him down.

“You still think accelerated aging was a bad idea?” Lex snarked, patting Conner's back gently with one hand as Conner screamed into Lex's shoulder.

Clark rolled his eyes. “Yeah, actually I do.” That had been one of Lex's worse ideas. Yes, childhood and especially infancy were inconvenient for parents, but they were important for the child. Hugely important. He held out his hands. “I can take him again. You go back to bed—maybe put some earplugs in so you can sleep.” They hadn't yet brought up the subject of a nanny, but maybe they should...

“I've *got* it!” Lex snapped, turning himself and Conner away—protectively, possessively. Taking a breath, he let it out slowly. “I can do this, Clark. I know you're...that this comes more naturally to you than it does to me. But I can do it. I can parent my own son.”

“I'm sorry.” Clark ran his hand up and down Lex's bicep. “I didn't mean—”

Lex sighed. “I know you didn't, Clark.”

“You are doing it, parenting him.” Clark sighed as well. “He's just not making it easy for us right now.”

Twisting his lips wryly, Lex said, “Somehow I doubt this will be the last time he makes things difficult.” He shook his head. “I was a *terror* in my teens.”

“I started dating a guy seven years my senior when I was just sixteen,” Clark pointed out.

Surprised laughter bubbled up, competing with Conner's crying. “Okay, point taken.” Frowning at Conner, he murmured, “I hope he has better taste than you did.”

Clark rolled his eyes. “You're not gonna be *my* dad are you? All over-protective and gruff?”

Lex shot him a narrowed-eyed look. “It'd be better than being *my* dad.”

Clark let out a sigh. “Okay, point taken.” Maybe Conner *would* have better taste—Clark's older self had said something about a telepathic shape-shifting girl from Mars, but Lex would probably think Clark was crazy if he brought that up. Clark wasn't so sure he *wasn't* crazy. That he hadn't imagined the whole 'future self' thing somehow. Because Lex—the guy who was still patiently rocking his two month old baby at nearly four am—wasn't the kind of person who needed to be *killed* to save the world from his evil, power-mad, deadly influence. Taking Lex's hand, Clark tugged him towards their bedroom. “Try lying down with him in our bed? Maybe he doesn't want to be alone?”

Lex grumbled that Conner *wasn't* alone at the moment and was still crying, but followed Clark anyway.

It took a few minutes to figure out an arrangement that worked, but when Clark pulled Conner against his chest with his little head resting on Clark's arm, and Lex put his own hand on Conner's shoulder, Conner finally took a few shuddering breaths and then calmed completely.

Glancing at the clock, Lex groaned. “He's going to need to eat again in another two hours.” Then he groaned more miserably. “I need to be *up* in two hours.”

Clark offered him a sympathetic grimace. “Sorry.”

But Lex shook his head then flopped it heavily down on his pillow. “It's not your fault. I mean, this whole baby thing was your idea, but—” His whole face grew more serious. “I love him.” His voice was quiet, edged in surprise. “All he does is eat and sleep and cry and poop...” He laughed, soft and breathless. “And I *love* him. I want to protect him and teach him and show him how much he's loved, how much he's valued.” His eyes met Clark's, wide and confused. “Clark, how can I love something that can't do anything for me and only makes my life more difficult?”

'Because you're a parent' was the 'easy' answer, but it wasn't the *true* one, because if anyone knew about parents who didn't love their children, it was Lex. “Because he's your child, and you're a good person,” Clark said instead. That was true. Lex *was* a good person. And a good parent.

o0o

Jonathan was loping about the back yard with a happily squealing Conner on his shoulders.

Lex sat, leaning against Clark's chest, head resting on Clark's shoulder. Glancing up at Clark he murmured, “We made a good kid, didn't we?” It wasn't the first time he'd asked; he was rather fond of asking.

“Yeah.” Clark grinned and pressed a kiss to Lex's temple. “We did.” They really had, and they were doing a good job so far raising him.

“Who's ready for some birthday cake?” Martha called from the door.

“Me!” Conner screamed.

“Some for grandpa too!” Jonathan grinned up at the little boy as he turned toward the house.

“Do Daddy and Papa get any?” Clark asked, still sitting, arms wrapped around Lex's chest.

“Only if you get there before we eat it all!” Jonathan called back over his shoulder.

“Do you want cake?” Clark asked, brushing his lips against Lex's ear.

“I'd never say no to your mom's baking.” Lex grinned up at him, kissed him, then stood up, brushing the grass off his slacks. He paused, looking thoughtfully at Clark as Clark got to his feet. “I've never understood what I did to deserve you,” he said softly.

Stepping forward, Clark grabbed him by the face and kissed him. “You never had to *do* anything.” He looked into Lex's eyes, willing him to understand. Maybe Lex couldn't understand, not yet. Too many years of Lionel's influence for the damage to be completely undone by a few short years with Clark. Clark let out a breath. “But you accepted me for who I am, and forgave me for lying to you. That meant a lot to me. It still does.”

Lex's lips twisted into an unsure grimace. “But you saved my life, and I probably still owe you for that.”

Clark gave him a helpless look. “Not everything is about paying back or being *owed*. Love is just *given*. Like the way you love Conner.”

Lex nodded, looking solemn for a moment, then grinned crookedly. “I guess being rich as hell didn't hurt.”

Clark tried to look offended—because he *was*—but he couldn't help laughing anyway. He tried to narrow his eyes. He couldn't think of anything to say.

Lex just grinned, unrepentant. “We'd better get in there before they do eat all the cake.” He slapped Clark's butt as he walked past.

As Clark turned to follow him, he wondered, had he done okay? Would his future self be happy with how things were turning out? *Lex* was happy. Clark's parents were both alive and happy. Conner was happy, a thriving boy enjoying his childhood with a loving family. And he himself was happy, so it felt like...maybe.

End Notes

This is probably the most indulgently, unashamedly, unrepentantly blatant fixfic I have ever written. You're welcome.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!